

[Redacted]

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MOBUTU Sese Seko
(Phonetic: moBOOtoo)

ZAIRE

200A

President (since November 1965)

*Addressed as: Mr. President or
Citizen President*



APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: MAY 2006

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Mobutu has exhibited an innate ability to overcome adversity. Regarded by his people as an all-powerful leader, he succeeded in 1965 in uniting a nation that had been torn by violence since independence in 1960. He has maintained this unity by suppressing ethnic and regional animosities and by adopting an autocratic and highly personalized leadership style. He tightly controls the Cabinet and other executive agencies, particularly the military establishment, and keeps close tabs on all political activity as president-founder of the Popular Movement of the Revolution, Zaire's only legal political party. [Redacted]

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Foreign and Economic Policy

Throughout his presidency, Mobutu has steered a pro-Western course.

The President has played an active role on selected African issues, sending troops to reinforce the anti-Libyan government in Chad, and promoting a negotiated solution to the civil war in Angola. He has also made a bid for regional leadership by advocating the creation of a league of black African states, but the proposal has largely fallen on deaf ears.

Mobutu has had many serious disagreements with the IMF, the IBRD, and foreign creditors on economic stabilization and recovery programs designed to cope with a steadily deteriorating economy.

Recently, he has sought debt forgiveness and is in a new fence-mending cycle with the IMF and IBRD.

Career and Personal Data

Mobutu was born on 14 October 1930 in Lisala, Equateur Region, the area from which he draws most of his closest associates. After completing his secondary education, he studied at the Institute of Social Studies in Brussels. He then returned home to enlist in the Belgian colonial army. At independence in 1960, he became chief of staff of the new National Army. He seized power later that year to restore order, placing the country under military control and outlawing all political activity; he then relinquished power and returned to his military job. Mobutu forcibly regained power in 1965, held elections in 1971, and is in his third consecutive seven-year term. Late last year, he ended a 23-year tenure as Minister of Defense, but he entrusted the portfolio to one of his closest subordinates, thus ensuring his continued control.

Mobutu has a commanding presence and is an articulate, forceful orator. He holds the military rank of marshal. Christened Joseph-Desiré Mobutu, the President changed his name during one of the Africanization campaigns that he initiated in the early 1970s. He prefers to be addressed as "Citizen President," the result of another Africanization campaign.

15 February 1989